PHILIP THE KING

AND OTHER POEMS

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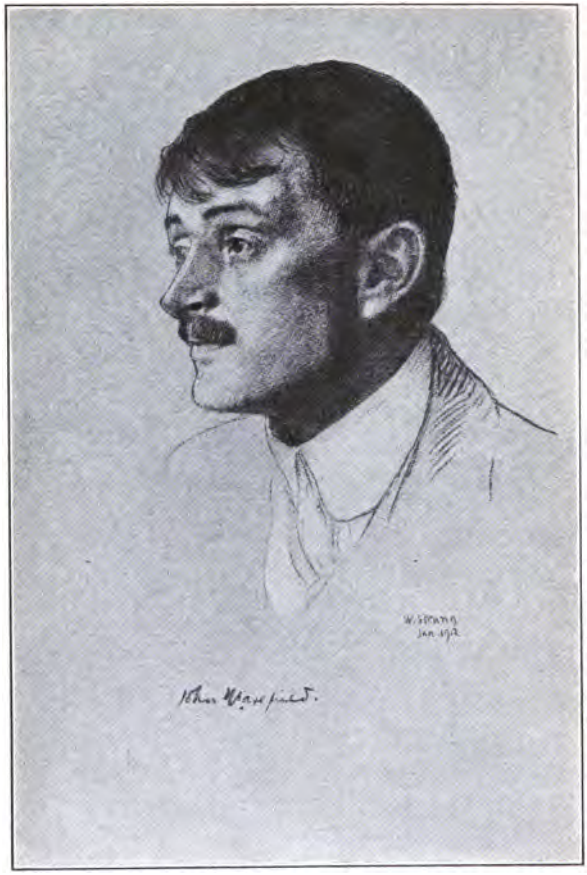
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PHILIP THE KING

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

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To

MY WIFE

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PHILIP THE KING

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

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His Daughter, the Infanta
An English Prisoner
A Spanish Captain
Guards

SPIRITS

Indians
Don John of Austria
Escovedo
Don Alvaro de Bazan, the Marquis of Santa Cruz
Alonso de Leyva

TIME

At dawn in late September, 1588

SCENE

A little dark cell in Philip's palace

PHILIP THE KING

PHILIP (*Kneeling*).

Lord, I am that Philip whom Thou hast made King of half the world. Thou knowest, Lord, how great a fleet I have fitted out to destroy the English, who work evil against Thee. Lord, I beseech Thee, keep that great Armada now, as I trust, in battle on the English coast. Protect my ships, O Lord, from fire and pestilence, from tempest and shipwreck, and in the day of battle. Amen. Amen.

Lord, now that the battle is joined, grant us Thy victory, I beseech Thee. Amen. Amen.

Lord, I beseech Thee to have in Thy special keeping my beloved friend, Alonso de Leyva,

now at sea with my fleet. Guard his ways, O Lord, that so he may come safely home to me. Amen. Amen.

Lord, of Thy mercy, I beseech Thee to send to me, if it be Thy will, some word or message from my fleet, that I may know Thy will concerning it, that my weary heart may find peace. Amen. Amen.

(*He rises.*)

Enter the PRINCESS.

PRINCESS.

Has no news come?

PHILIP.

None yet.

PRINCESS.

Still nothing?

PHILIP.

No.

PRINCESS.

Two months now since they sailed and still no word.

PHILIP.

The wind is foul; they cannot send.

PRINCESS.

I know.

And yet what tales, what rumours we have
heard.

How the heart sickens for the want of news.

Is that a courier?

PHILIP.

No.

PRINCESS.

What if we lose?

PHILIP.

Why should we lose?

PRINCESS.

Because of too much pride

Planning for glory not as scripture bade.

PHILIP.

I am not proud nor hopeful, nor afraid.

But you are trembling, sweet, and heavy-
eyed.

PRINCESS.

I am afraid, for all night long
The spirit of Spain's committed wrong,
Nourished wherever a life was shed,
    Stood near my bed;
And all night long it talked to me
Of a trouble there is beyond the sea.
A trouble of war . . . I heard a horn
    Blowing forlorn,
And I knew that it came from far away,
From men of Spain in a pass at bay
Blowing for help; the beaten call
None heeds at all.
And now I fear that we have angered Him
    Who makes pride dim.

PHILIP.

What we have done with our might
Cannot be hateful to God.
He speaks with dreams in the night
That the tired heart turn home

And an end of brooding come.
My heart has flushed in His praise,
The glow in my heart took sail
In a fleet that darkens the sprays;
Sacrifice may not avail,
But the uttermost gift is wise.

PRINCESS.

Yes, I believe that; and the deed is grand —
It is a mighty blow to deal for God.
But in my ear there rings
Ill-omened words about the pride of kings —
"Pride is the evil that destroys a land."

PHILIP.

Brooding and watching waste you, you must
sleep;
The hand of God will bring us through the
deep.

PRINCESS.

Amen, my father, but my heart is breaking.

PHILIP.

You are too young for heart-break; let it be.

PRINCESS.

There was another fear which kept me waking:
Spain's unborn monarchs came by night to me,
Each holding fewer of the Spanish gems
Here and abroad, each weaker in the soul.
With wearier brows and dimmer diadems,
And feebler fingers giving up control,
Till, as it seemed, a hundred years from now,
An idiot child was all the might of Spain,
And English spirits beat them on the brow,
Robbing their gems and binding them with chain.
And Spain's proud flag was draggled in the sea.
And then these shapes lamented, threatening me;

Saying that we began Spain's downfall here —
So grimly, father, that I shook with fear.

PHILIP.

Child, these are only dreams. I have learned this
Since I have been a king, that our concern
Is not with Hope nor Fear, but with what is,
Which, when we follow dreams, we cannot learn.
Be patient, child; besides, the wind has changed;
God's will must never find our hearts estranged:
The wind is north, the news may come to-day.
Ship after ship is running down the Bay
With news; God grant that it be happy news.

PRINCESS.

Rest till it comes, dear father.

PHILIP.

You can choose,
You who are young, whether to rest or no;
When one is old one sees the hours go.
Dear, they go fast from withered men like me.
You were my little daughter on my knee
When first this war with England was conceived.
Now you are this . . ., it would not be believed,
And nothing done, and still time hurrying by.
We are two grey old partners — Time and I:
Look at the work we do . . . you talk of rest.

PRINCESS.

You call your Captains in and choose the best,
And make him do the work.

PHILIP.

Ah, you're a Queen,
That is what you would do, but I am King.
Kings have no beauty to make duty keen;
They have to supervise with whip and sting.

PRINCESS.

You do not whip men; you are good and mild.

PHILIP.

Artists and Kings do what they can, my child,
Not what they would. It is not easy, dear,
Working with men, for men are only clay,
They crumble in the hand, or they betray
And time goes by, but no results appear —
Your little hands have happier work than mine.
Ah, little daughter, childhood is divine.

PRINCESS.

I am no child now that the fleet has sailed;
I was till then, but now I realize
What it would cost my father if it failed.

PHILIP.

Yes, it has cost some life, this enterprise.

PRINCESS.

But all you had to do was give the word.

PHILIP.

Ah, darling, many thousand men have heard
Orders from me since this attempt began
Seventeen years ago. Full many a man
Who helped the earliest outlines of the plot
Died at his unknown task suspecting not
What pattern his life's colour helped to weave.
Child, if I told you, you would not believe
How this idea has triumphed on unchanged
Past great commanders' deaths, past faith estranged,
Past tyranny and bloodshed and ill-hap,
Treachery striking like a thunder-clap,
Murder, betrayal, lying, past all these,
Past the grim days when feelings had to freeze

Lest the great King should drop his mask of
lies
And hint his purpose to the thwarted spies,
Past half a world of men and years of thought,
Past human hope, to be the thing I sought.
Now that the dice are scattered for the stakes,
I half forget that old affront of Drake's,
By which this war with England was begun.
O child, the labour that must first be done
Before a King can act! — unending work.
All the long days of beating down the Turk,
Then when Don John had thrust the Cres-
cent down
(You cannot know) he plotted for the crown;
Don John, my Admiral, plotted against me.
He would have sunk the English in the sea,
But since he plotted, that was ended too.
Then a great world of labour still to do,
The French to check, and then the Portu-
guese,

PRINCESS.

All a long summer day those ships defiled.
I never saw so many nor so grand;
They wandered down the tide and cleared the land,
And ranked themselves like pikemen, clump to clump.
Then in the silence came the Admiral's trump,
And from those hundreds of expectant ships,
From bells and cannonade and sailors' lips,
And from the drums and trumpets of the foot
Burst such a roaring thunder of salute
As filled my heart with wonder like a cup.
They cheered St. James's banner going up —
Golden St. James, whose figure blew out fair,
High on the flagship's mast in the blue air,
Rippling the gold. Then all the city bells,

Fired like the singing spheres some spirit impels,
Rang in the rocking belfries, the guns roared,
Each human soul there shook like tautened cord.
And to that Christian march the singing priests
Bore up the blessed banners. Even the beasts
Ramped at the challenge of that shouting crowd.
Then, as the wind came fair, the Armada bowed.
Those hundreds of great vessels, ranked in line,
Buried their bows and heaped the bubbled brine
In gleams before them. So they marched; the van,
Led by De Leyva, like slipped greyhounds, ran

To spy the English. On the right and left
By Valdes and his friend the seas were cleft;
Moncada's gallies weltered like a weir,
Flanking Recalde, bringing up the rear,
While in the midst St. James's banner
marched,
Blowing towards England till the flagpole
arched.
Onward they swept the sea, the flagship's
side
Smoked from her cannon's hail; she took
her stride,
Leaned and stretched forward.
I was conscious then
That I beheld the greatest fleet that men
Ever sent seaward; all the world was there,
All nations that begem the crown you
wear,
Pikemen of Rome, whose settled pikes had
stood

Stern in full many a welter of man's blood.
Cunning Levantines, armed with crooked
    swords,
Venetians bronzed, the ocean's overlords,
Pisans and knights of Malta, Ferrarese,
Passionate half-bloods from the Indian seas,
Hollanders, Austrians, even English, come
To bring again religion to their home;
Spain too, our Andalusians, and the hale
Iberian Basquers used to hunt the whale —
The flower of the knighthood of the world
Mustered beneath the banner you unfurled.

* * * * * *

And that was but the half, for there in
    France
Was Parma's army ready to advance,
Death-coupled bloodhounds straining to the
    slip,
Waiting your navy's coming to take ship.
Father, such power awed me.

PHILIP.

Time and I
Worked for long years.

PRINCESS.

And when it had passed by
The bells were silent, and a sigh arose
Of joy in that fleet's pride, and grief for those
Who, even if all went well, had looked their last
On men and women who had made their past.
Then darkness came, and all that I could see
Was the horizon where the fleet must be —
A dimming skyline with a setting star.
It was as though they died; and now, who knows
What has befallen them, or where they are?

And night by sleepless night my trouble grows.
This daily silence has been hard to bear,
But now I dread news worse.

PHILIP.

We must prepare,
Hoping the best, but ready for the worst;
But patient still, for rumour must come first —
Rumour and broken news and seamen's lies;
Patience, expecting nothing, is most wise.
If God vouchsafes it, we shall hear to-day.
Lighten your heart, my daughter.

PRINCESS.

I will pray —
Pray for a Spanish triumph.

PHILIP.

Pray for me.
Pray for God's cause adventured on the sea.

PRINCESS.

I will; God help my prayer.

PHILIP.

God help us both.

[*She goes.*

Lord, I have laboured long to keep my oath,
And since my loved one died it has been hard.
O Lord, my God, in blessed mercy guard
My only friend De Leyva, now at sea;
Keep him, O Lord, and bring him home to me.
O Lord, be thou his bulwark and his guide;
I am so lonely since my loved one died.

How splendidly the nations hold their way,
Marching with banners through the fields of Time!

Who sees the withered King weary and grey,
Prompting it all with secret lust or crime?
Who guesses at the heavy brain behind?
I am Earth's greatest man; the world is blind.

(*He droops over his papers. Starting up.*)

I have still strength, and I must read these scrolls,
Or else all goes to ruin; I must read.

(*He sleeps.*)

VOICES.

Philip!

PHILIP.

Who calls?

The INDIANS *enter.*

VOICES.

We are the Indian souls,
Loosed from the gold-mines where our brothers bleed.
We swell the tale of blood: we dug you gold;

We bore your burdens till we died of thirst;
We sweated in the mines or shook with cold,
Washing the gravel which the blast had burst.
We dived for pearls until our eyeballs bled;
You burned us till we told where treasure lay.
We were your Indian slaves, but we are dead;
Our red account is cast and you must pay.

A Voice.

Our lives paid for your fleet; you pay for us.
The unjustly killed restore the balance thus.

A Voice.

They flung my little baby to the hounds.

A Voice.

They took my daughter from me for their lust.

A Voice.

Even the weak are strong beyond life's bounds;
We myriad weak add power to the thrust.

Voices.

Philip! Philip! Philip!
We gather from over the sea
To the justice that has to be
While the blind red bull goes on.
Philip! Philip! Philip!
We who were ciphers slain
In a tale of the pride of Spain
Are a part of her glory gone.

A Voice.

We see them where our will can help their foes.

A VOICE.

Quick, brother, quick! another galleon goes!
Waken those sleeping gunners by the fire,
Or she'll escape unracked. [*They fade away.*

PHILIP.

The voices tire.
They go. I dreamed. I slept. My heavy head
Is drowsed. What man is that?

(DON JOHN *appears, with* ESCOVEDO *behind him.*)

VOICE OF DON JOHN OF AUSTRIA.

I am the dead;
I am your brother, Philip — brother John.

PHILIP.

You corpse-fetch from the unclean grave, begone!
I had no brother.

DON JOHN.

Would you never had!

PHILIP.

You were a landmark of my father's sin,
Never my brother.

DON JOHN.

I was that bright lad,
Your father's son, my brother; I helped win
Great glory for you, Philip.

PHILIP.

I agreed
To overlook your bastardy, my friend,
So long as your bright talents served my need;
But you presumed, and so it had to end.

DON JOHN.

My talents served you well.

PHILIP.

They did, at first.

DON JOHN.

I won the Battle of Lepanto for you.

PHILIP.

And afterwards you killed my troops with thirst,
Following a crazy scheme which overbore you.

DON JOHN.

Not crazy, unsuccessful.

PHILIP.

Poor vain ghost,
Poor flickering candle that was bright awhile.

DON JOHN.

I was the man whom Europe worshipped most,
One with a mighty plan which you thought guile.
Why did you kill me, Philip?

PHILIP.

You betrayed me,
Or would have, traitor, had I not been wise.

DON JOHN.

I was your board's best piece, you should have played me,
Now I am dead and earth is in my eyes.
I could have won you England. I had planned
To conquer England. I had all prepared
Ships, soldiers, money, but your cruel hand
Killed me, and nothing's done and nothing's dared.

PHILIP.

You planned to conquer England and be King;
Those who obstruct my path I sweep aside.

DON JOHN.

Brother, there is a time for everything;
That was the time for England, but I died;
Now you attempt too late,
The powers have closed the gate,

Destiny enters by another door,
The lost chance comes no more.

THE VOICE OF ESCOVEDO.

Philip, he tells the truth. We could have won
England for you, we were no plotters then.

VOICES.

Philip, you were betrayed, you were undone.
You had the moment, but you killed the men.

ESCOVEDO.

The liar, Perez, tricked you. O great King!
We would have added England to your crown,
Now the worms cling
About our lips deep down.
You had me stabbed at midnight going home

That man of Perez' stabbed me in the
back.
And then I could not stir, down on the
loam;
The sky was full of blood, the stars were
black.
And then I knew my wife and children
waited
But that I could not come; a moving hand
Had interposed a something fated
'Twixt us and what we planned.

DON JOHN.

You had me poisoned in that Holland den,
Outcast, alone, without the help of men.
We planned a glorious hour
Hoisting the banner of Spain
On he top of London Tower,
With England a Spanish fief.
Life cannot happen again,
And doing dies with the brain;

Autumn ruins the flower
And after the flower the leaf.

VOICES.

Philip, Philip, Philip!
The evil men do has strength,
It gathers behind the veils
While the unjust thing prevails.
While the pride of life is strong,
But the balance tips at length,
And the unjust things are tales,
The pride of life is a song.

PHILIP.

I kept my purpose while you lived. Shall I
Be weaker, now that you are dead, you things?
What can such reedy wretches do but die
Standing against the purposes of Kings?

DON JOHN.

Do? We can thwart you.

VOICES.

And we will, we will;
All Spain's unjustly murdered work you ill.
Gather against him, gather, mock him down.

THE VOICE OF THE MARQUIS OF SANTA CRUZ.

Scatter, you shadows, fly. Philip, great King.
You vultures gathered in an unclean ring;
Away, you shadows, scatter.
They are gone,
Philip.

The MARQUIS *enters.*

PHILIP.

Who calls?

SANTA CRUZ.

Master.

PHILIP.

Let me dream on.
Whose voice was that? It warned me of defeat.

SANTA CRUZ.

I am that Santa Cruz who built your fleet,
And died to make it good. It was my child.
I call because my work has been defiled.

PHILIP.

Why rail, uneasy soul?

SANTA CRUZ.

If I had spent
Less life in that, I should be still alive,
Commanding what I built to my content,
Driving the English slaves as conquerors drive.
Why did you give away my splendid sword,
Forged by a never-conquered captain's brain,
Into the hoof-hand of an ambling lord,
Useless in all things, but to ruin Spain?
Would God I had but guessed it! Would my stars

Had shown me clearer what my death
would bring,
I would have burned those galleons, guns
and spars,
Soldiers and all, and so have stopped this
thing.
And doing that I should have served you
well,
And brought less ruin on this lovely land.
What folly from the unfed brain of hell
Made you promote that thing to my com-
mand? —
Folly from which so many men must die.

PHILIP.

We stand against all comers, Time and I.
I chose the Duke because I wanted one . . .
Who . . .

SANTA CRUZ.

Give no reason for the evil done.
Souls wrestle from the ever deedless grave

To do, not to hear reason. Oh, great King,
You still may save the ruin of this thing!

PHILIP.

You speak of ruin. Tell me what you see.

SANTA CRUZ.

Ruin that threatens, but need never be.
Be silent, Philip; listen while I tell
What you must do.

PHILIP.

You are a voice from hell;
I will not listen to these obscene dreams.

SANTA CRUZ.

Life is a heavy cloud, through which come
gleams.
Oh, Philip, let me speak! Philip, I say,
One way can still be tried; I see the way.
You must do this, but listen.

PHILIP.

I still doubt.

SANTA CRUZ.

Listen, great King; the light is dying out.
You are fading from me, Philip; they are coming.
Before it is too late for ever send . . .

PHILIP.

Send?

SANTA CRUZ.

Yes.

PHILIP.

To whom?

SANTA CRUZ.

To . . .

VOICES.

Drown his voice with drumming;
Pipe with the Inca conch, the Indian flute.
What red flowers spring from this blood-sprinkled root!

PHILIP.

What name was that you said?

SANTA CRUZ.

Wait, Philip — wait;
They are so many and so full of hate.

VOICES.

Call to your monarch, Marquis — call again.

PHILIP.

Something he meant is knocking at my
brain —
Knocking for entrance. Marquis!

SANTA CRUZ.

Philip! King!

PHILIP.

What must I do?

SANTA CRUZ.

Oh, fiends!

VOICES.

Ah, conquerors, sing!
Now we have triumphed.
We have torn the flag.
Dance in a ring, victorious spirits, dance;
Brought to a byword is the Spanish brag,
And ruined is the grand inheritance.
Mourn, wretched Philip, for your plans are
checked;

Your colonies defenceless; your sweet faith
Mocked by the heretics; your ships are wrecked;
The strength of Spain has dwindled to a wraith.
Aha! you beaten King, you blinded fool!
Scream, for the empire tumbles from your rule.

PHILIP.

God will deliver me; you are but words
Called in the night-time by malignant birds
But who are you?

The figure of DE LEYVA *enters.*

VOICE OF DE LEYVA.

I am De Leyva, come
Out of the sea, my everlasting home,
To whisper comfort to my ruined friend.
Dear, I am dead, but friendship cannot end;
Love does not die, and I am with you here.
Often in sorrow you will feel me near,

Feel me, but never speak, nor hear me speak.
Philip, whatever bitter Fate may wreak
On Spain and you, remember I am here,
The dead are bound to those they held most
dear.

PHILIP.

Dreams of the night. I dreamed De Leyva
came.

VOICES.

Awake to hear the story of your shame.

(*They cry. A gun is shot off. Bells.*)

PHILIP.

(*Rousing.*) I dreamed I was defeated like
those men
Whom I defeated; I have felt their woe.
What is this noise? A message?
Enter then.

PRINCESS.

A prisoner comes with news of victory.

PHILIP.

So.
Victory comes! We win!

PRINCESS.

The fleet has won!

PHILIP.

Thanks be to God on high.

PRINCESS.

His will be done.

PHILIP.

Lord, help me use this victory for Thy praise.
Lord, Thou hast burst this night of many days
With glorious morning and my heart is full.
O God, my God, Thy ways are wonderful!
Bring me the prisoner.

PRINCESS.

He brought this letter.

An Englishman is brought in.

PHILIP.

You are an Englishman?

PRISONER.

Yes, your Majesty.

PHILIP.

This letter says that you can tell me how things have fared. Tell me your story.

PRISONER.

I was at sea, my lord, fishing, some fifteen miles south-west from Falmouth. We were not expecting the Spanish fleet, our cruisers had said it was not coming. It was hazy summer weather and early morning. We could hear that we were among a big fleet, and when the haze lifted your ships were all round us, so we were taken aboard an admiral's ship. A dark man the admiral was, with a very quick way; he was not the chief admiral, but an Admiral Recalde, with the rearguard.

PHILIP.

Where was the English fleet at that time? Was it expecting us?

PRISONER.

No, your honour. It was windbound in Plymouth, unprepared, as I told your admiral. Then I was taken down below.

PHILIP.

Did our fleet enter Plymouth, then?

PRISONER.

No, my lord, and I could not think why, for the wind held and they had only to sail straight in. The day passed.

The next day there was firing, and I thought "The English have got out of the trap at least," but the firing died down, and I concluded the English were beaten.

PHILIP.

Yes?

PRISONER.

I thought the ships would put ashore then to take what they had won, but they kept at sea some days, though there was firing every day, sometimes very heavy. They said

they were burning all the English towns as they passed, and then going to France to fetch an army; and after some nights I was brought ashore in Calais to come to your Majesty.

PHILIP.

What did you see in Calais?

PRISONER.

It was dark night, my lord, when they sent me in. I saw the road full of shipping, lit up like a town.

PHILIP.

What was the feeling among you English prisoners? That the Spaniards had prospered?

PRISONER.

Yes, my lord. You had reached your army, which was all your intent. You had only to take it across the Channel; the wind was fair for that.

PHILIP.

So then you started for Spain. You know no more of what happened?

PRISONER.

No, my lord, except that looking back from a hilltop, I saw a great glare over Calais.

PHILIP.

Something was burning there?

PRISONER.

It was the bonfires, my lord, to give them light; they were embarking the army. Then in France later on we heard that Drake had been sunk off Calais with fifteen ships. A man said he had seen it. That is all I know, my lord.

PHILIP.

What you say will be proved. You will be returned to England. Treat this man well. [*Exit* PRISONER.

PRINCESS.

Father, what blessed news!

PHILIP.

We have not failed;
But then he hardly knew. The letter here
Shows that our navy partly has prevailed.

PRINCESS.

The news has spread.

CRIES WITHOUT.

Long live King Philip! Cheer!

CRIES.

Cheer our great King! Long live our noble
King.
Beat "Santiago," drummers.

PRINCESS.

Hark! they sing.
The court is dark with people, but more
come.

CRIES.

Long live King Philip!

A GREAT VOICE.

Silence for the drum!
And when the drum beats, we will lift our thanks
Till his heart triumphs.
Silence in the ranks!
Eyes front! O people, listen! Our attempt
Has triumphed more than our desires dreamt.
England is ours. Give thanks. Sound trumpets. Sing!

CRIES.

Philip, Philip the King! God save the King!
Philip the conqueror! Philip!

(*A strange cry.*)

PRINCESS.

Oh, look! look! . . .
Just as they cheered, the palace banners shook,
They took it for a sign.

The guards are there,
Look, and the monks are forming in the square
Bringing the blessed relics. Oh, my dear!
I am so happy. Listen how they cheer.
Father, they're cheering because Spain has won.
All you have hoped and striven for is done.
I hardly dare believe it.

CRIES.

Long live Spain.

PRINCESS.

O, there are horsemen, I must look again!

CRIES.

There is the Princess at the window. See?
God save you, little lady. Which is she?
There. Is the King there? No. He must be. Yes.
God save your Grace. He's there with the Princess.

PHILIP.

Stand farther back; they saw you.

PRINCESS.

Oh, not now!
They called 'God save me,' father; let me
bow.

PHILIP.

Bow, then, my dear.

CRIES.

God save your pretty face.

PRINCESS.

Father, do come, they want you.

CRIES.

Bless your Grace.
God save the King — King Philip.

PRINCESS.

Father dear,
They're calling for you; stand beside me
here.

PHILIP.

Not yet. It is not time.

CRIES.

Philip the King!

PRINCESS.

Oh, father, come! It is a thrilling thing
To know they won, and hear these shouts of
praise.

CRIES.

God save the King! God send him many
days!
Philip the King, the conqueror of the sea!
St. James for Spain, King Philip, victory!
King Philip! Santiago!

PRINCESS.

Father.

PHILIP.

Wait!
Kings must not yield them at too cheap a
rate.

VOICES.

Philip the King! The English are destroyed!
God save him! Victory! We are overjoyed!

Let the bells ring! King Philip! Philip! King!

Ring the Cathedral bells — ay, let them ring!

St. James for Spain! King Philip! Clear the guns! (*Guns shot off.*)

King Philip, fire — fire all at once!

King Philip, fire! King Philip, fire! St. James!

Thank God, the King of kings, the Name of names!

Fire, King Philip! Santiago, fire!

Give thanks to God who gives us our desire!

Philip, God save and bless him!

PHILIP (*going to window*).

I will speak.

VOICES.

Fire! He's there! King Philip!

PHILIP.

Man is weak.

VOICES.

He's there!

PRINCESS.

Oh, father, look!

PHILIP.

Stand at my side.

VOICES.

God bless and guard our blessed country's
guide!
King Philip, fire! The King!

(*The bells begin.*)

PRINCESS.

Oh, bells of joy!
And now the monks are singing.

THE MONKS.

Let us give thanks unto the Lord of lords,
Who saves His faithful from the Egyptian
swords.

VOICES.

Amen. God save the King.

THE MONKS.

He made the Red Sea waters to divide,
And led our Israel through with Him for guide.

VOICES.

Amen. God save the King! Philip the King!

PHILIP.

O God, I thank Thee for this marvellous thing.

THE MONKS.

He whelmed King Pharaoh's army in the sea,
And of His mercy gave us victory.

VOICES.

The famous kings are blown like chaff
Before Thy fiery car.
Thou smit'st th' ungodly with Thy staff . . .
Philip the King! God save our prudent King!

PHILIP.

My subjects, whom God gave me for His ends . . .

PRINCESS.

Whatever pain you bore, this makes amends.

VOICES.

Speak to your loving hearts, your Majesty.

PHILIP.

I do His will; to God the glory be.

THE MONKS.

Praise Him, O sun and moon, morning and
evening star!
The kings who mocked His word are broken
in the war.
Praise Him with heart and soul! Praise
Him with voice and lute!

VOICES.

The King! God save the King! Silence!
He speaks. Salute!

THE MONKS.

In the dark night, ere dawn, we will arise
and sing
Glory to God on high, the praises of our King.

VOICES.

The King is going to speak. He makes a
sign.
God bless your noble Grace and all your line!

God bless you, Sir, for all your thought for us!
The conquering King, Philip victorious!
Philip the great and good! Hush! Silence!
Peace!
Philip! Attention! Bid the ringers cease.
The King is going to speak; he raised his
hand.

PRINCESS.

Dear, to be loved as you are is most grand.
Speak to them, father; thank them for their
love.

THE MONKS.

I will exalt the Name of God above.

VOICES.

The bells are hushed. Be quiet! Silence
all!

PHILIP.

I thought I heard, far off, a funeral call;
As in your dream, a melancholy cry.

PRINCESS.

It was the fifes.

PHILIP.

No; listen!

PRINCESS.

That sound?

PHILIP.

Ay.

PRINCESS.

It was the crowd outside. Now they are
still.

PHILIP.

No; it was singing coming up the hill —
Sad singing, too.

PRINCESS.

I did not hear it.

PHILIP.

There!

PRINCESS.

The bells have left a trembling in the air.

PHILIP.

No; it was voices. I will speak one word
To these below. There is the noise I heard

(RECALDE'S *men are heard singing.*)

RECALDE'S MEN.

Out of the deep, out of the deep, we come,
Preserved from death at sea to die at home.
Mercy of God alone preserved us thus;
In the waste sea Death laid his hand on us.

PRINCESS.

The Black Monks in a penitential psalm.

VOICES.

Philip the King!

PHILIP.

I'll wait.

PRINCESS.

Oh, speak!

PHILIP.

Be calm!
I cannot cross God's word with words of mine.

VOICES.

Quiet, you singers!

PRINCESS.

They are men in line.

(RECALDE'S *men are heard singing.*)

RECALDE'S MEN.

We called the world too small with boastful lips;
Now we are ghosts crawled from the bones of ships.
We were most glorious at our setting sail;
Now our knees knock, our broken spirits fail.
Our banner is abased and all our pride:
A tale of ships that sank and men who died.

PRINCESS.

Listen! Who are they?

PHILIP.

What is it they sing?

VOICES.

The King is speaking. Silence for the King!
Let the King speak; be still. You ragged crew,
Have you no manners? Silence! Who are you?

RECALDE'S MEN.

We are the beaten men, the men accursed,
Whose bitter glory 'tis t' have borne the worst.

PRINCESS.

They are not monks.

PHILIP.

Nor beggars.

PRINCESS.

Now they stand.

VOICES.

Yon navy's sweepings driven back to land.
Go to the hens and tunnies; beat them down
Back to the sea you ran from; back and drown.

RECALDE'S MEN.

Pity our shame, you untried heroes here.
Defeat's not victory, but 'tis bought as dear.

PHILIP.

They are sailors from the fleet.

PRINCESS.

They come with news.
They are ragged to the skin, they have no
shoes.

PHILIP.

The crowd is still.

PRINCESS.

Why do they come like this?

PHILIP.

Listen; their Captain tells them what it is.

RECALDE'S MEN.

Darken the bedrooms for us, people all,
And let us turn our faces to the wall,
And let the darkness and the silence make
A quiet time in which our hearts may
break.

(*A murmur runs through the Court.*)

PRINCESS.

Father, what is it?

PHILIP.

Child, the Act of One
Who chastens earthly kings, whose Will
be done.

PRINCESS.

It means that we are beaten?

PHILIP.

Who can tell?

PRINCESS.

Father.

PHILIP.

Dear child, even defeat is well.

PRINCESS.

I thought that we were happy.

PHILIP.

Watch the square.
Now tell me calmly what is passing there.

PRINCESS.

The Captain comes, the crowd is making
way.

PHILIP.

Who is it? Can you see?

PRINCESS.

His hair is grey.
He walks bareheaded, slowly, and the crowd
Shrink as though Death were passing in
his shroud.

PHILIP.

Worse news has come. Who is the man?

PRINCESS.

His face . . .
I seem to know him, but the air is strange.
He puts the touch of Death upon the place.
Nothing but Death could fashion such a
change.
He carries something. Now the people
kneel.
We are defeated, Father.

PHILIP.

What I feel
I cover. Go within. Misfortune stuns
None but the tender. [*Exit* PRINCESS.

VOICES.

Give us back our sons.

Philip, give back our sons, our lovely sons.

THE PALACE GUARD.

Halt! Who comes there?

A VOICE.

Spain and the Empire.

THE GUARD.

Pass,

Spain and the Empire.

VOICES.

They are drowned. Alas!

Philip, give back our sons, our lovely sons.

Enter MESSENGER, *carrying an Admiral's chain.*

PHILIP.

What brings you to me, Captain?

MESSENGER.

This gold chain . . .

Bears the twelve badges of the strength of Spain

Once linked in glory, Philip, but now
loosed.

(*Detaching link from link.*)

Castilla, Leon, Aragon, and these,
Palestine, Portugal, the Sicilies,
Navarre, Granada, the Valencian State,
The Indies, East and West, the Archducate,
The Western Mainland in the Ocean Sea.
Those who upheld their strength have
ceased to be.
I, who am dying, King, have seen their graves.
Philip, your Navy is beneath the waves.

PHILIP.

He who in bounty gives in wisdom takes.

MESSENGER.

O King, forgive me, for my spirit breaks;
I saw those beaches where the Grange de-
scends
White with unburied corpses of stripped
friends.

PHILIP.

I grieve that Spain's disaster brings such
loss.

MESSENGER.

From Pentland to the Groyne the tempests
toss
Unshriven Spaniards driving with the tide.
They were my lovely friends and they have
died,
Far from wind-broken Biscay, far from
home,
With no anointing chrism but the foam.

PHILIP.

The dead will rise from unsuspected slime;
God's chosen will be gathered in God's time.

MESSENGER.

King, they died helpless; our unwieldy fleet
Made such a target to the English guns
That we were riddled through like sifted
wheat.

We never came to grappling with them once.
They raked us from a distance, and then ran.
Each village throughout Spain has lost a man;
The widows in the seaports fill the streets.

PHILIP.

Uncertain chance decides the fate of fleets.

MESSENGER.

Now the North Sea is haunted for all time
By miserable souls whose dying words
Cursed the too proud adventure as a crime.
Our broken galleons house the gannet-birds.
The Irish burn our Captain's bones for lime.
O misery that the might of England wrought!

PHILIP.

Christ is the only remedy for thought
When the mind sickens. We are pieces played,
Not moving as we will, but as we are made;
Beaten and spurred at times like stubborn steeds,
That we may go God's way. Your spirit bleeds,
Having been proved in trouble past her strength.
Give me the roll in all its ghastly length.
Which of my friends survive, if any live?

MESSENGER.

Some have survived, but all are fugitive.
Your Admiral in command is living still;
Michael Oquendo too, though he is ill,
Dying of broken heart and bitter shame.
Valdes is prisoner, Manrique the same.

PHILIP.

God willed the matter; they are not to blame.
Thank God that they are living. Name the rest.

MESSENGER.

They are all dead . . . with him you loved the best.

PHILIP.

I dreamed De Leyva died, so it is true?

MESSENGER.

Drowned on the Irish coast with all his crew.
After enduring dying many days
The sea has given him quiet. Many ways
Lead men to death, and he a hard one trod,
Bearing much misery, like a knight of God.

PHILIP.

Amen. Go on.

MESSENGER.

Hugh de Monçada died,
Shot in his burning ship by Calais side,
Cheering his men to save her. Pimentel
Sank in a galleon shambled like a hell
Rather than yield, and in a whirl of flames
Pedro Mendoza, Captain of St. James,
Stood with Don Philip thrusting boarders back
Till their Toledan armour was burnt black,
And both their helms ran blood. And there they fell,
Shot down to bleed to death. They perished well,
Happy to die in battle for their King
Before defeat had fallen on their friends;
Happier than most, for where the merrows sing
Paredes and his brother met their ends,
And Don Alarcon, cast alive ashore,

Was killed and stripped and hanged upon a tree.
And young Mendoza, whom the flagship bore,
Died of starvation and of misery.
But hundreds perished, King; why mention these?
Battle and hunger, heart-break, and the seas
Have overwhelmed the chivalry of Spain.

PHILIP.

Misfortune, after effort, brings no stain.
Perhaps I underjudged the English fleet.
How was it that the Spaniards met defeat?
What evil fortune brought about our fall?

MESSENGER.

Their sailors and their cannon did it all.

PHILIP.

Yet when the fleet reached Calais all went well.

MESSENGER.

Our woes began there.

PHILIP.

Tell me what befell.

MESSENGER.

We were to ship the troops in Calais Road;
They lay encamped, prepared to go aboard.
To windward still the English fleet abode —
Still as in port when peace has been restored.

The wind and sea were fair,
We lay at anchor there;
The stars burned in the air,
The men were sleeping,
When in the midnight dark
Our watchman saw a spark
Suddenly light a bark
With long flames leaping.

Then, as they stood amazed,
Others and others blazed;

Then terror set them crazed,
They ran down screaming:
"Fire-ships are coming! Wake
Cast loose, for Jesus' sake!
Eight fire-ships come from Drake —
Look at their gleaming!"

Roused in the dark from bed,
We saw the fire show red,
And instant panic spread
Through troops and sailors;
They swarmed on deck unclad,
They did what terror bade,
King, they were like the mad
Escaped from jailers.

Some prayed for mercy, some
Rang bells or beat the drum,
As though despair had come
At hell's contriving;

Captains with terror pale
Screamed through the dark their hail,
"Cut cable, loose the sail,
And set all driving!"

Heading all ways at once,
Grinding each other's guns,
Our blundering galleons
Athwart-hawse galleys,
Timbers and plankings cleft,
And half our tackling reft,
Your grand Armada left
The roads of Calais.

Weary and overwrought
We strove to make all taut;
But when the morning brought
The dawn to light us,
Drake, with the weather gage,
Made signal to engage,

And, like a pard in rage,
Bore down to fight us.

Nobly the English line
Trampled the bubbled brine;
We heard the gun-trucks whine
To the taut laniard.
Onwards we saw them forge,
White billowing at the gorge.
"On, on!" they cried, "St. George!
Down with the Spaniard!"

From their van squadron broke
A withering battle-stroke,
Tearing our plankèd oak
By straiks asunder,
Blasting the wood like rot
With such a hail of shot,
So constant and so hot
It beat us under.

The English would not close;
They fought us as they chose,
Dealing us deadly blows
For seven hours.
Lords of our chiefest rank
The bitter billow drank,
For there the English sank
Three ships of ours.

* * * * *

Then the wind forced us northward from the fight;
We could not ship the army nor return;
We held the sea in trouble through the night,
Watching the English signals blink and burn.
The English in a dim cloud kept astern;
All night they signalled, while our shattered ships
Huddled like beasts beneath the drovers' whips.

* * * * *

At dawn the same wind held; we could
not strive.
The English drove us north as herdsmen
drive.

* * * * *

Under our tattered flags,
With rigging cut to rags,
Our ships like stricken stags
Were heaped and hounded.
Caught by the unknown tide,
With neither chart nor guide,
We fouled the Holland side,
Where four more grounded.

Our water-casks were burst,
The horses died of thirst,
The wounded raved and curst,
Uncared, untended.
All night we heard the crying
Of lonely shipmates dying;

We had to leave them lying.
So the fight ended.

PHILIP.

God gives His victory as He wills. But this
Was not complete destruction. What thing worse
Came to destroy you?

MESSENGER.

An avenging curse,
Due for old sins, destroyed us.

PHILIP.

Tell the tale.

MESSENGER.

O King, when morning dawned it blew a gale,
But still the English followed, and we fled
Till breakers made the dirty waters pale.
We saw the Zealand sandbanks right ahead,
Blind in a whirling spray that gave us dread;

For we were blown there, and the water
shoaled.
The crying of the leadsmen at the lead,
Calling the soundings, were our death-
bells tolled.

We drifted down to death upon the sands —
The English drew away to watch us drown;
We saw the bitter breakers with grey
hands
Tear the dead body of the sandbank brown.
We could do nothing, so we drifted down
Singing the psalms for death — we who
had been
Lords of the sea and knights of great re-
nown,
Doomed to be strangled by a death un-
clean.

PHILIP.

So there the ships were wrecked?

MESSENGER.

Time had not struck.

O King, we learned how blessed mercy saves:
Even as our forefoot grounded on the muck,
Tripping us up to drown us in the waves,
A sudden windshift snatched us from our graves
And drove us north; and now another woe,
Tempest unending, beat our ships to staves —
A never-dying gale with frost and snow.

Now our hearts failed, for food and water failed;
The men fell sick by troops, the wounded died.
They washed about the wet decks as we sailed

For want of strength to lift them overside.
Desolate seas we sailed, so grim, so wide,
That ship by ship our comrades disappeared.
With neither sun nor star to be a guide,
Like spirits of the wretched dead we steered.

Till, having beaten through the Pentland Pass,
We saw the Irish surf, with mists of spray
Blowing far inland, blasting trees and grass,
And gave God thanks, for we espied a bay
Safe, with bright water running down the clay —
A running brook where we could drink and drink.
But drawing near, our ships were cast away,
Bilged on the rocks; we saw our comrades sink . . .

Or worse: for those the breakers cast ashore
The Irish killed and stripped; their bodies white
Lay naked to the wolves — yea, sixty score —
All down the windy beach, a piteous sight.
The savage Irish watched by bonfire light
Lest more should come ashore; we heard them there
Screaming the bloody news of their delight.
Then we abandoned hope and new despair.

And now the fleet is sunken in the sea,
And all the seamen, all the might of Spain,
Are dead, O King, and out of misery,
Never to drag at frozen ropes again —
Never to know defeat, nor feel the pain
Of watching dear companions sink and die.
Death's everlasting armistice to the brain
Gives their poor griefs quietus; let them lie.

I, like a ghost returning from the grave,
Come from a stricken ship to tell the news
Of Spanish honour which we could not save,
Nor win again, nor even die to lose;
And since God's hidden wisdom loves to bruise
Those whom He loves, we, trembling in despair,
Will watch our griefs to see God's finger there,
And make His will our solace and excuse.

Defeat is bitter and the truth is hard —
Spain is defeated, England has prevailed;
This is the banner which I could not guard,
And this the consecrated sword which failed.
Do with your dying Captain as you will.

(*He lays down sword and banner.*)

PHILIP.

I, from my heart, thank God, from whose great hand
I am so helped with power, I can still
Set out another fleet against that land.
Nor do I think it ill
If all the running water takes its course
While there are unspent fountains at the source.

He sendeth out His word and melteth them.
Take back your standard, Captain. As you go,
Bid the bells toll and let the clergy come.
Then in the city by the strike of drum
Proclaim a general fast. In bitter days
The soul finds God, God us.

[*Exit Captain.*

PHILIP (*alone*).

De Leyva, friend,
Whom I shall never see, never again,
This misery that I feel is over Spain.
O God, beloved God, in pity send
That blessed rose among the thorns — an end:
Give a bruised spirit peace.

(*He kneels. A muffled march of the drums.*)

CURTAIN.

OTHER POEMS

THE "WANDERER"

ALL day they loitered by the resting ships,
Telling their beauties over, taking stock;
At night the verdict left my messmates' lips,
"The *Wanderer* is the finest ship in dock."

I had not seen her, but a friend, since drowned,
Drew her, with painted ports, low, lovely, lean,
Saying, "The *Wanderer*, clipper, outward bound,
The loveliest ship my eyes have ever seen —

"Perhaps to-morrow you will see her sail.
She sails at sunrise": but the morrow showed

No *Wanderer* setting forth for me to hail;
Far down the stream men pointed where
she rode,

Rode the great trackway to the sea, dim,
dim,
Already gone before the stars were gone.
I saw her at the sea-line's smoky rim
Grow swiftly vaguer as they towed her on.

Soon even her masts were hidden in the haze
Beyond the city; she was on her course
To trample billows for a hundred days;
That afternoon the norther gathered force,

Blowing a small snow from a point of east.
"Oh, fair for her," we said, "to take her
south."
And in our spirits, as the wind increased,
We saw her there, beyond the river mouth,

Setting her side-lights in the wildering dark,
To glint upon mad water, while the gale
Roared like a battle, snapping like a shark,
And drunken seamen struggled with the
sail.

While with sick hearts her mates put out of
mind
Their little children left astern, ashore,
And the gale's gathering made the darkness
blind,
Water and air one intermingled roar.

Then we forgot her, for the fiddlers played,
Dancing and singing held our merry crew;
The old ship moaned a little as she swayed.
It blew all night, oh, bitter hard it blew!

So that at midnight I was called on deck
To keep an anchor-watch: I heard the sea

Roar past in white procession filled with
wreck;
Intense bright frosty stars burned over me,

And the Greek brig beside us dipped and
dipped,
White to the muzzle like a half-tide rock,
Drowned to the mainmast with the seas she
shipped;
Her cable-swivels clanged at every shock.

And like a never-dying force, the wind
Roared till we shouted with it, roared until
Its vast vitality of wrath was thinned,
Had beat its fury breathless and was still.

By dawn the gale had dwindled into flaw,
A glorious morning followed: with my friend
I climbed the fo'c's'le-head to see; we saw
The waters hurrying shorewards without end.

Haze blotted out the river's lowest reach;
Out of the gloom the steamers, passing by,
Called with their sirens, hooting their sea-
speech;
Out of the dimness others made reply.

And as we watched, there came a rush of
feet
Charging the fo'c's'le till the hatchway
shook.
Men all about us thrust their way, or beat,
Crying, "The *Wanderer!* Down the river!
Look!"

I looked with them towards the dimness;
there
Gleamed like a spirit striding out of night,
A full-rigged ship unutterably fair,
Her masts like trees in winter, frosty-
bright.

Foam trembled at her bows like wisps of
wool;
She trembled as she towed. I had not
dreamed
That work of man could be so beautiful,
In its own presence and in what it seemed.

"So, she is putting back again," I said.
"How white with frost her yards are on the
fore."
One of the men about me answer made,
"That is not frost, but all her sails are
tore,

"Torn into tatters, youngster, in the gale;
Her best foul-weather suit gone." It was
true,
Her masts were white with rags of tattered
sail
Many as gannets when the fish are due.

Beauty in desolation was her pride,
Her crowned array a glory that had been;
She faltered tow'rds us like a swan that died,
But although ruined she was still a queen.

"Put back with all her sails gone," went the
word;
Then, from her signals flying, rumour ran,
"The sea that stove her boats in killed her
third;
She has been gutted and has lost a man."

So, as though stepping to a funeral march,
She passed defeated homewards whence she
came,
Ragged with tattered canvas white as starch,
A wild bird that misfortune had made tame.

She was refitted soon: another took
The dead man's office; then the singers hove

Her capstan till the snapping hawsers shook;
Out, with a bubble at her bows, she drove.

Again they towed her seawards, and again
We, watching, praised her beauty, praised her trim,
Saw her fair house-flag flutter at the main,
And slowly saunter seawards, dwindling dim;

And wished her well, and wondered, as she died,
How, when her canvas had been sheeted home,
Her quivering length would sweep into her stride,
Making the greenness milky with her foam.

But when we rose next morning, we discerned
Her beauty once again a shattered thing;

Towing to dock the *Wanderer* returned,
A wounded sea-bird with a broken wing.

A spar was gone, her rigging's disarray
Told of a worse disaster than the last;
Like draggled hair dishevelled hung the stay,
Drooping and beating on the broken mast.

Half-mast upon her flagstaff hung her flag;
Word went among us how the broken spar
Had gored her captain like an angry stag,
And killed her mate a half-day from the bar.

She passed to dock upon the top of flood.
An old man near me shook his head and swore:
"Like a bad woman, she has tasted blood —
There'll be no trusting in her any more."

We thought it truth, and when we saw her
there
Lying in dock, beyond, across the stream,
We would forget that we had called her fair,
We thought her murderess and the past a
dream.

And when she sailed again, we watched in awe,
Wondering what bloody act her beauty
planned,
What evil lurked behind the thing we saw,
What strength was there that thus annulled
man's hand,

How next its triumph would compel man's
will
Into compliance with external Fate,
How next the powers would use her to work
ill
On suffering men; we had not long to wait.

For soon the outcry of derision rose,
"Here comes the *Wanderer!*" the expected cry.
Guessing the cause, our mockings joined with those
Yelled from the shipping as they towed her by.

She passed us close, her seamen paid no heed
To what was called: they stood, a sullen group,
Smoking and spitting, careless of her need,
Mocking the orders given from the poop.

Her mates and boys were working her; we stared.
What was the reason of this strange return,
This third annulling of the thing prepared?
No outward evil could our eyes discern.

Only like one who having formed a plan
Beyond the pitch of common minds, she sailed,
Mocked and deserted by the common man,
Made half divine to me for having failed.

We learned the reason soon; below the town
A stay had parted like a snapping reed,
"Warning," the men thought, "not to take her down."
They took the omen, they would not proceed.

Days passed before another crew would sign.
The *Wanderer* lay in dock alone, unmanned,
Feared as a thing possessed by powers malign,
Bound under curses not to leave the land.

But under passing Time fear passes too;
That terror passed, the sailors' hearts grew bold.

We learned in time that she had found a crew
And was bound out and southwards as of
old.

And in contempt we thought, "A little while
Will bring her back again, dismantled,
spoiled.
It is herself; she cannot change her style;
She has the habit now of being foiled."

So when a ship appeared among the haze,
We thought, "The *Wanderer* back again";
but no,
No *Wanderer* showed for many, many days,
Her passing lights made other waters glow.

But we would often think and talk of her,
Tell newer hands her story, wondering, then,
Upon what ocean she was *Wanderer*,
Bound to the cities built by foreign men.

And one by one our little conclave thinned,
Passed into ships and sailed and so away,
To drown in some great roaring of the wind,
Wanderers themselves, unhappy fortune's
prey.

And Time went by me making memory dim,
Yet still I wondered if the *Wanderer* fared
Still pointing to the unreached ocean's rim,
Brightening the water where her breast was
bared.

And much in ports abroad I eyed the ships,
Hoping to see her well-remembered form
Come with a curl of bubbles at her lips
Bright to her berth, the sovereign of the storm.

I never did, and many years went by,
Then, near a Southern port, one Christmas
Eve,

I watched a gale go roaring through the sky,
Making the caldrons of the clouds upheave.

Then the wrack tattered and the stars appeared,
Millions of stars that seemed to speak in fire;
A byre cock cried aloud that morning neared,
The swinging wind-vane flashed upon the spire.

And soon men looked upon a glittering earth,
Intensely sparkling like a world new-born;
Only to look was spiritual birth,
So bright the raindrops ran along the thorn.

So bright they were, that one could almost pass
Beyond their twinkling to the source, and know

The glory pushing in the blade of grass,
That hidden soul which makes the flowers
grow.

That soul was there apparent, not revealed,
Unearthly meanings covered every tree,
That wet grass grew in an immortal field,
Those waters fed some never-wrinkled sea.

The scarlet berries in the hedge stood out
Like revelations but the tongue unknown;
Even in the brooks a joy was quick: the
trout
Rushed in a dumbness dumb to me alone.

All of the valley was aloud with brooks;
I walked the morning, breasting up the fells,
Taking again lost childhood from the rooks,
Whose cawing came above the Christmas
bells.

I had not walked that glittering world before,
But up the hill a prompting came to me,
"This line of upland runs along the shore:
Beyond the hedgerow I shall see the sea."

And on the instant from beyond away
That long familiar sound, a ship's bell, broke
The hush below me in the unseen bay.
Old memories came: that inner prompting
spoke.

And bright above the hedge a seagull's
wings
Flashed and were steady upon empty air.
"A Power unseen," I cried, "prepares these
things;
Those are her bells, the *Wanderer* is there."

So, hurrying to the hedge and looking down,
I saw a mighty bay's wind-crinkled blue

Ruffling the image of a tranquil town,
With lapsing waters glittering as they grew.

And near me in the road the shipping swung,
So stately and so still in such great peace
That like to drooping crests their colours hung,
Only their shadows trembled without cease.

I did but glance upon those anchored ships.
Even as my thought had told, I saw her plain;
Tense, like a supple athlete with lean hips,
Swiftness at pause, the *Wanderer* come again —

Come as of old a queen, untouched by Time,
Resting the beauty that no seas could tire,
Sparkling, as though the midnight's rain were rime,
Like a man's thought transfigured into fire.

And as I looked, one of her men began
To sing some simple tune of Christmas day;
Among her crew the song spread, man to man,
Until the singing rang across the bay;

And soon in other anchored ships the men
Joined in the singing with clear throats, until
The farm-boy heard it up the windy glen,
Above the noise of sheep-bells on the hill.

Over the water came the lifted song —
Blind pieces in a mighty game we swing;
Life's battle is a conquest for the strong;
The meaning shows in the defeated thing.

AUGUST, 1914

How still this quiet cornfield is to-night!
By an intenser glow the evening falls,
Bringing, not darkness, but a deeper light;
Among the stooks a partridge covey calls.

The windows glitter on the distant hill;
Beyond the hedge the sheep-bells in the fold
Stumble on sudden music and are still;
The forlorn pinewoods droop above the wold.

An endless quiet valley reaches out
Past the blue hills into the evening sky;
Over the stubble, cawing, goes a rout
Of rooks from harvest, flagging as they fly.

So beautiful it is, I never saw
So great a beauty on these English fields,

Touched by the twilight's coming into awe,
Ripe to the soul and rich with summer's
yields.

* * * * *

These homes, this valley spread below me
here,
The rooks, the tilted stacks, the beasts in pen,
Have been the heartfelt things, past-speaking
dear
To unknown generations of dead men,

Who, century after century, held these farms,
And, looking out to watch the changing sky,
Heard, as we hear, the rumours and alarms
Of war at hand and danger pressing nigh.

And knew, as we know, that the message
meant
The breaking off of ties, the loss of friends,

Death, like a miser getting in his rent,
And no new stones laid where the trackway
ends.

The harvest not yet won, the empty bin,
The friendly horses taken from the stalls,
The fallow on the hill not yet brought in,
The cracks unplastered in the leaking walls.

Yet heard the news, and went discouraged
home,
And brooded by the fire with heavy mind,
With such dumb loving of the Berkshire
loam
As breaks the dumb hearts of the English
kind,

Then sadly rose and left the well-loved
Downs,
And so by ship to sea, and knew no more

The fields of home, the byres, the market
towns,
Nor the dear outline of the English shore,

But knew the misery of the soaking trench,
The freezing in the rigging, the despair
In the revolting second of the wrench
When the blind soul is flung upon the air,

And died (uncouthly, most) in foreign lands
For some idea but dimly understood
Of an English city never built by hands
Which love of England prompted and made
good.

* * * * *

If there be any life beyond the grave,
It must be near the men and things we love,
Some power of quick suggestion how to save,
Touching the living soul as from above.

An influence from the Earth from those dead
hearts
So passionate once, so deep, so truly kind,
That in the living child the spirit starts,
Feeling companioned still, not left behind.

Surely above these fields a spirit broods,
A sense of many watchers muttering near
Of the lone Downland with the forlorn woods
Loved to the death, inestimably dear.

A muttering from beyond the veils of Death
From long-dead men, to whom this quiet
scene
Came among blinding tears with the last
breath,
The dying soldier's vision of his queen.

All the unspoken worship of those lives
Spent in forgotten wars at other calls

Glimmers upon these fields where evening
drives
Beauty like breath, so gently darkness falls.

Darkness that makes the meadows holier
still,
The elm-trees sadden in the hedge, a sigh
Moves in the beech-clump on the haunted
hill,
The rising planets deepen in the sky,

And silence broods like spirit on the brae,
A glimmering moon begins, the moonlight
runs
Over the grasses of the ancient way
Rutted this morning by the passing guns.

THE RIVER

All other waters have their time of peace,
Calm, or the turn of tide or summer drought;
But on these bars the tumults never cease,
In violent death this river passes out.

Brimming she goes, a bloody-coloured rush
Hurrying her heaped disorder, rank on rank,
Bubbleless speed so still that in the hush
One hears the mined earth dropping from the
bank,

Slipping in little falls whose tingeings drown,
Sunk by the waves for ever pressing on.
Till with a stripping crash the tree goes
down,
Its washing branches flounder and are gone.

Then, roaring out aloud, her water spreads,
Making a desolation where her waves
Shriek and give battle, tossing up their heads,
Tearing the shifting sandbanks into graves,

Changing the raddled ruin of her course
So swiftly, that the pilgrim on the shore
Hears the loud whirlpool laughing like a horse
Where the scurfed sand was parched an hour
before.

And always underneath that heaving tide
The changing bottom runs, or piles, or quakes
Flinging immense heaps up to wallow wide,
Sucking the surface into whirls like snakes.

If anything should touch that shifting sand,
All the blind bottom sucks it till it sinks;
It takes the clipper ere she comes to land,
It takes the thirsting tiger as he drinks.

And on the river pours — it never tires;
Blind, hungry, screaming, day and night the same
Purposeless hurry of a million ires,
Mad as the wind, as merciless as flame.

* * * * *

There was a full-rigged ship, the *Travancore*,
Towing to port against that river's rage —
A glittering ship made sparkling for the shore,
Taut to the pins in all her equipage.

Clanging, she topped the tide; her sails were furled,
Her men came loitering downwards from the yards;
They who had brought her half across the world,
Trampling so many billows into shards,

Now looking up, beheld their duty done,
The ship approaching port, the great masts bare,
Gaunt as three giants striding in the sun,
Proud, with the colours tailing out like hair.

So, having coiled their gear, they left the deck;
Within the fo'c'sle's gloom of banded steel,
Mottled like wood with many a painted speck,
They brought their plates and sat about a meal.

Then pushing back the tins, they lit their pipes,
Or slept, or played at cards, or gently spoke,
Light from the portholes shot in dusty stripes
Tranquilly moving, sometimes blue with smoke.

These sunbeams sidled when the vessel rolled,
Their lazy yellow dust-strips crossed the floor,
Lighting a man-hole leading to the hold,
A man-hole leaded down the day before.

Like gold the solder on the man-hole shone;
A few flies threading in a drowsy dance
Slept in their pattern, darted, and were gone.
The river roared against the ship's advance.

And quietly sleep came upon the crew,
Man by man drooped upon his arms and slept;
Without, the tugboat dragged the vessel through,
The rigging whined, the yelling water leapt,

Till blindly a careering wave's collapse
Rose from beneath her bows and spouted high,

Spirting the fo'c'sle floor with noisy slaps;
A sleeper at the table heaved a sigh,

And lurched, half-drunk with sleep, across
the floor,
Muttering and blinking like a man insane,
Cursed at the river's tumult, shut the door,
Blinked, and lurched back and fell asleep
again.

Then there was greater silence in the room,
Ship's creakings ran along the beams and
died,
The lazy sunbeams loitered up the gloom,
Stretching and touching till they reached the
side.

* * * * *

Yet something jerking in the vessel's course
Told that the tug was getting her in hand

As, at a fence, one steadies down a horse,
To rush the whirlpool on Magellan Sand;

And in the uneasy water just below
Her Mate inquired "if the men should stir
And come on deck?" Her Captain answered
"No,
Let them alone, the tug can manage her."

Then, as she settled down and gathered
speed,
Her Mate inquired again "if they should
come
Just to be ready there in case of need,
Since, on such godless bars, there might be
some."

But "No," the Captain said, "the men have
been
Boxing about since midnight, let them be.

The pilot's able and the ship's a queen,
The hands can rest until we come to quay."

They ceased, they took their stations; right
ahead
The whirlpool heaped and sucked; in tenor
tone
The steady leadsman chanted at the lead,
The ship crept forward trembling to the bone.

And just above the worst a passing wave
Brought to the line such unexpected stress
That as she tossed her bows her towrope
gave,
Snapped at the collar like a stalk of cress.

Then, for a ghastly moment, she was loose,
Blind in the whirlpool, groping for a guide,
Swinging adrift without a moment's truce,
She struck the sand and fell upon her side.

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They found that Fate had caught them in a
pen,
The door that opened out was jammed with
wreck.

Then, as, with shoulders down, their gathered
strength
Hove on the door, but could not make it
stir,
They felt the vessel tremble through her
length;
The tug, made fast again, was plucking
her.

Plucking, and causing motion, till it seemed
That she would get her off; they heard her
screw
Mumble the bubbled rip-rap as she steamed;
"Please God, the tug will shift her!" said
the crew.

"She's off!" the seamen said; they felt her glide,
Scraping the bottom with her bilge, until
Something collapsing clanged along her side;
The scraping stopped, the tugboat's screw was still.

"She's holed!" a voice without cried; "holed and jammed —
Holed on the old *Magellan*, sunk last June.
I lose my ticket and the men are damned;
They'll drown like rats unless we free them soon.

"My God, they shall not!" and the speaker beat
Blows with a crow upon the foremast's wreck;
Minute steel splinters fell about his feet,
No tremour stirred the ruin on the deck.

And as their natures bade, the seamen learned
That they were doomed within that buried door;
Some cursed, some raved, but one among them turned
Straight to the manhole leaded in the floor,

And sitting down astride it, drew his knife,
And staidly dug to pick away the lead,
While at the ports his fellows cried for life:
"Burst in the door, or we shall all be dead!"

For like a brook the leak below them clucked.
They felt the vessel settling; they could feel
How the blind bog beneath her gripped and sucked.
Their fingers beat their prison walls of steel.

And then the gurgling stopped — the ship was still.
She stayed; she sank no deeper — an arrest

Fothered the pouring leak; she ceased to fill.
She trod the mud, drowned only to the breast.

And probing at the well, the captain found
The leak no longer rising, so he cried:
"She is not sinking — you will not be drowned;
The shifting sand has silted up her side.

"Now there is time. The tug shall put ashore
And fetch explosives to us from the town;
I'll burst the house or blow away the door
(It will not kill you if you all lie down).

"Be easy in your minds, for you'll be free
As soon as we've the blast." The seamen heard
The tug go townwards, butting at the sea;
Some lit their pipes, the youngest of them cheered.

But still the digger bent above the lid,
Gouging the solder from it as at first,
Pecking the lead, intent on what he did;
The other seamen mocked at him or cursed.

And some among them nudged him as he picked.
He cursed them, grinning, but resumed his game;
His knife-point sometimes struck the lid and clicked.
The solder-pellets shone like silver flame.

And still his knife-blade clicked like ticking time
Counting the hour till the tug's return,
And still the ship stood steady on the slime,
While Fate above her fingered with her urn.

* * * * *

Then from the tug beside them came the hail:
"They have none at the stores, nor at the dock,
Nor at the quarry, so I tried the gaol.
They thought they had, but it was out of stock.

"So then I telephoned to town; they say
They've sent an engine with some to the pier;
I did not leave till it was on its way,
A tug is waiting there to bring it here:

"It can't be here, though, for an hour or more;
I've lost an hour in trying, as it is.
For want of thought commend me to the shore.
You'd think they'd know their river's ways by this."

"So there is nothing for it but to wait,"
The Captain answered, fuming. "Until then,
We'd better go to dinner, Mr. Mate."
The cook brought dinner forward to the men.

* * * * *

Another hour of prison loitered by;
The strips of sunlight stiffened at the port,
But still the digger made the pellets fly,
Paying no heed to his companions' sport,

While they, about him, spooning at their tins,
Asked if he dug because he found it cold,
Or whether it was penance for his sins,
Or hope of treasure in the forward hold.

He grinned and cursed, but did not cease to pick,
His sweat dropped from him when he bent his head,

His knife-blade quarried down, till with a click
Its grinded thinness snapped against the lead.

Then, dully rising, brushing back his sweat,
He asked his fellows for another knife.
"Never," they said; "man, what d'ye hope to get?"
"Nothing," he said, "except a chance for life."

"Havers," they said, and one among them growled,
"You'll get no knife from any here to break.
You've dug the manhole since the door was fouled,
And now your knife's broke, quit, for Jesus' sake."

But one, who smelt a bargain, changed his tone,
Offering a sheath-knife for the task in hand
At twenty times its value, as a loan
To be repaid him when they reached the land.

And there was jesting at the lender's greed
And mockery at the digger's want of sense,
Closing with such a bargain without need,
Since in an hour the tug would take them thence.

But "Right," the digger said. The deal was made
He took the borrowed knife, and sitting down
Gouged at the channelled solder with the blade,
Saying, "Let be, it's better dig than drown."

And nothing happened for a while; the heat
Grew in the stuffy room, the sunlight slid,
Flies buzzed about and jostled at the meat,
The knife-blade clicked upon the manhole lid:

And one man said, "She takes a hell of time
Bringing the blaster," and another snored;
One, between pipe-puffs, hummed a smutty rhyme,
One, who was weaving, thudded with his sword.

It was as though the ship were in a dream,
Caught in a magic ocean, calm like death,
Tranced, till a presence should arise and gleam,
Making the waters conscious with her breath

It was so drowsy that the river's cries,
Roaring aloud their ever-changing tune,
Came to those sailors like the drone of flies,
Filling with sleep the summer afternoon.

So that they slept, or, if they spoke, it was
Only to worry lest the tug should come:
Such power upon the body labour has
That prison seemed a blessed rest to some,

Till one man leaning at the port-hole, stared,
Checking his yawning at the widest stretch,
Then blinked and swallowed, while he muttered, scared,
"That blasting-cotton takes an age to fetch."

Then swiftly passing from the port he went
Up and then down the fo'c'sle till he stayed,

Fixed at the port-hole with his eyes intent,
Round-eyed and white, as if he were afraid,

And muttered as he stared, "My God! she is.
She's deeper than she was, she's settling down.
That palm-tree top was steady against this,
And now I see the quay below the town.

"Look here at her. She's sinking in her tracks.
She's going down by inches as she stands;
The water's darker and it stinks like flax,
Her going down is churning up the sands."

And instantly a panic took the crew,
Even the digger blenched; his knife-blade's haste

Cutting the solder witnessed that he knew
Time on the brink with not a breath to
waste.

While far away the tugboat at the quay
Under her drooping pennon waited still
For that explosive which would set them
free,
Free, with the world a servant to their will.

Then from a boat beside them came a blare,
Urging that tugboat to be quick; and men
Shouted to stir her from her waiting there,
"Hurry the blast, and get us out of pen.

"She's going down. She's going down,
man! Quick!"
The tugboat did not stir, no answer came;
They saw her tongue-like pennon idly lick
Clear for an instant, lettered with her name.

Then droop again. The engine had not
come,
The blast had not arrived. The prisoned
hands
Saw her still waiting though their time had
come,
Their ship was going down among the sands,

Going so swiftly now, that they could see
The banks arising as she made her bed;
Full of sick sound she settled deathward,
she
Gurgled and shook, the digger picked the
lead.

And, as she paused to take a final plunge,
Prone like a half-tide rock, the men on deck
Jumped to their boats and left, ere like a
sponge
The river's rotten heart absorbed the wreck;

And on the perilous instant ere Time struck
The digger's work was done, the lead was cleared,
He cast the manhole up; below it muck
Floated, the hold was full, the water leered.

All of his labour had but made a hole
By which to leap to death; he saw black dust
Float on the bubbles of that brimming bowl,
He drew a breath and took his life in trust,

And plunged head foremost into that black pit,
Where floating cargo bumped against the beams.
He groped a choking passage blind with grit,
The roaring in his ears was shot with screams.

So, with a bursting heart and roaring ears
He floundered in that sunk ship's inky
    womb,
Drowned in deep water for what seemed
    like years,
Buried alive and groping through the tomb,

Till suddenly the beams against his back
Gave, and the water on his eyes was bright;
He shot up through a hatchway foul with
    wrack
Into clean air and life and dazzling light,

And striking out, he saw the fo'c'sle gone,
Vanished, below the water, and the mast
Standing columnar from the sea; it shone
Proud, with its colours flying to the last.

And all about, a many-wrinkled tide
Smoothed and erased its eddies, wander-
    ing chilled,

Like glutted purpose, trying to decide
If its achievement had been what it willed.

And men in boats were there; they helped
    him in.
He gulped for breath and watched that
    patch of smooth,
Shaped like the vessel, wrinkle into grin,
Furrow to waves and bare a yellow tooth.

Then the masts leaned until the shroud-
    screws gave.
All disappeared — her masts, her colours,
    all.
He saw the yardarms tilting to the grave;
He heard the siren of a tugboat call,

And saw her speeding, foaming at the bow,
Bringing the blast-charge that had come
    too late.

He heard one shout, "It isn't wanted now."
Time's minute-hand had been the hand of Fate.

Then the boats turned; they brought him to the shore.
Men crowded round him, touched him, and were kind;
The Mate walked with him, silent, to the store.
He said, "We've left the best of us behind."

Then, as he wrung his sodden clothes, the Mate
Gave him a drink of rum, and talked awhile
Of men and ships and unexpected Fate;
And darkness came and cloaked the river's guile,

So that its huddled hurry was not seen,
Only made louder, till the full moon climbed
Over the forest, floated, and was queen.
Within the town a temple-belfry chimed.

Then, upon silent pads, a tiger crept
Down to the river-brink, and crouching there
Watched it intently, till you thought he slept
But for his ghastly eye and stiffened hair.

Then, trembling at a lust more fell than his,
He roared and bounded back to coverts lone,
Where, among moonlit beauty, slaughter is,
Filling the marvellous night with myriad groan.

WATCHING BY A SICK-BED

I HEARD the wind all day,
And what it was trying to say.
I heard the wind all night
Rave as it ran to fight;
After the wind the rain,
And then the wind again
Running across the hill
As it runs still.

And all day long the sea
Would not let the land be,
But all night heaped her sand
On to the land;
I saw her glimmer white
All through the night,
Tossing the horrid hair
Still tossing there.

And all day long the stone
Felt how the wind was blown;
And all night long the rock
Stood the sea's shock;
While, from the window, I
Looked out, and wondered why,
Why at such length
Such force should fight such strength.

NOTE

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